

VZCZCXRO9958
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0256/01 0461908
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 151908Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1047
INFO RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1966
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2234
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHLB/USDAO BEIRUT LE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/USCENTCOM SPECIAL HANDLING MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000256

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEMAYEL SAYS CHRISTIAN WITH MUSCLES
NEEDED IN SINIORA CABINET

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a February 15th introductory office call, former president Amine Gemayel warmly welcomed Charge Sison. Gemayel said he told PM Siniora in a telephone call on February 14 that Lebanon needed to address the lack of Christian representation in the government by either electing a president (always a Maronite Christian in Lebanon's confessional politics) or strengthening the role of Christians in the Siniora cabinet. Gemayel argued that if the void was not filled soon, Michel Aoun would use the lack of Christian leadership to attack the March 14 bloc in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Gemayel also said Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah's February 14 speech was a declaration of war on Israel, not on behalf of Hizballah, but on behalf of Iran. Finally, Gemayel also offered his pessimistic opinion on the Arab League's initiative as well as his February 8 meeting with Amr Moussa, and added that March 14 needed to develop a new strategy soon given the deteriorating situation. End Summary.

12. (C) The Charge, accompanied by Poloff, met with Gemayel at his residence on February 15. Gemayel thanked the Charge for continued USG support for Lebanon and expressed his appreciation for the USG's political, military, and economic assistance.

A CHRISTIAN "WITH MUSCLES"
NEEDED IN CABINET

13. (C) Gemayel said that after the previous evening's fiery speech by Nasrallah, Gemayel counseled the PM by telling him that one of two things needed to happen to increase March 14 Christian support and counter the growing threat posed by Hizballah. Either a president should be elected immediately by exercising the 50 plus 1 parliamentary voting option or Siniora should reshuffle his cabinet to enhance the role of Christians.

14. (C) Gemayel said Siniora once again proposed that Gemayel designate someone to replace the seat vacated by his son Pierre, the former Minister of Industry, who was assassinated in November 2006. Gemayel said he told Siniora that filling

his son's seat was not needed to shore up March 14 support amongst Christians, but that Christians needed a visible and meaningful role in Lebanon's governing process. The political impasse has left the key Christian controlled GOL institution, the presidency, vacant.

15. (C) He described Finance Minister Jihad Azour (a Christian) as a decent man who was well liked. However, many Christians see Azour as "Siniora's employee" rather than a partner, according to Gemayel. He said "there needs to be someone with muscles and not just some technocrat" to represent Christians in the Siniora government. Gemayel argued that the Sunni and Druze confessions were meaningfully represented. By contrast, Gemayel derided the current Christian representation, saying "our figures are the great lady Nayla Mouawad, the Social Affairs Minister, and Joseph Sarkis, the Minister of Tourism." Clearly Gemayel would like a Christian to represent a more powerful or respected Ministry.

16. (C) Gemayel said if Siniora were to reshuffle the cabinet, it should not be a "cosmetic reshuffling," but a real one. If someone such as Azour has to be sacrificed so that a "stronger" Christian can be brought into the cabinet, so be it. (Note: Gemayel admitted that sacking Azour was unlikely because of Siniora's dependence on Azour's ability to manage efficiently the GOL's complex finances. End Note.) Having Christians come to Martyrs' square to protest in unity with Sunni and Druze protesters does not make Christians feel as if they are truly March 14 partners, according to Gemayel.

AOUN BENEFITS FROM CHRISTIAN'S

BEIRUT 00000256 002 OF 003

PERCEIVED WEAKNESS

17. (C) Gemayel told Siniora that this lack of Christian representation gives opposition and Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun, a Christian, a weapon to use against the March 14 majority and Siniora cabinet. Therefore, to combat Aoun's popularity, March 14 should proceed with the 50 plus one option voting option to fill the presidential vacuum. An alternative way to counter Aoun's Christian strength is beefing up the Christian presence in the cabinet.

18. (C) He said "We will have to face our constituencies in 2009 and if Christians continue to feel as if they are being marginalized in the governing process, they will turn to Aoun and support him." In addition, if March 14 has to battle Hizballah, it will first have to go through Aoun. March 14 Christians, could not do so without real power in government would find this difficult. Gemayel said he felt as if Siniora brushed off his suggestions. Gemayel felt this dismissive attitude would hurt March 14 in the future.

NASRALLAH DECLARED WAR ON
ISRAEL ON BEHALF OF IRAN

19. (C) Gemayel described Nasrallah's February 14 speech in Beirut as a declaration of war on Israel on behalf of Iran. Gemayel said Hizballah is part of Iran's strategy for the region. "Nasrallah is not a puppet, nor a proxy or tool of the Iranian leadership" Gemayel said. "Nasrallah is part of the Iranian political and religious establishment; he is their representative in Lebanon and part of the revolutionary council," he added. Gemayel said "When Nasrallah speaks; he speaks on behalf of Iran." To prove his point, Gemayel noted that Hizballah is a faction of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and receives the same training, equipment, and financing as the IRGC receives.

110. (C) He pointed out that Nasrallah made his declaration in

front of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who attended the February 14 funeral of slain militant Imad Mughniyah and could be seen on television applauding during Nasrallah's speech. Gemayel said "this is no longer a Lebanese issue; this is fully an Iranian issue." Gemayel noted that Hizballah has an arms factory in Lebanon that was built and financed by Iran.

¶11. (C) Gemayel described this as a "new era" and added that Nasrallah would not have given the February 14 funeral speech without the approval of Iran. Nor would he have done so without the means to carry out his threat, Gemayel added. He said Nasrallah's speech was directed against Israeli, American, and Western interests in the region and less so towards Lebanon. Gemayel compared recent events as being similar to events in 1975 that led to the beginning of the 15 year civil war.

ARAB LEAGUE INITIATIVE MEANINGLESS

¶12. (C) Gemayel referred to the Arab League as the most "sterile" institution in the world. Gemayel said the Arab League "makes nice speeches and uses nice words," but that its initiative to solve the political stalemate was meaningless. The Arab League is weak; the rules of the institution make it so that nothing can be achieved without total unanimity, which is difficult to achieve on contentious issues.

¶13. (C) He noted that this problem existed because Lebanese Christians during the 1940s objected to the idea of a majority rule voting system in the Arab League fearing that Arab Muslims would try to marginalize Lebanese Christians. Ironically, Lebanon itself lobbied for the unanimous voting system that exists today. Gemayel noted that countries like Syria and Qatar are now using the unanimous decision rule to block any initiative that does not serve their individual interests. In addition, Gemayel described the words chosen by the Arab League in its January 6 communique as being

BEIRUT 00000256 003 OF 003

chosen very carefully by Syria. The resulting ambiguity has indeed served the interests of Syria's allies in the March 8 opposition.

¶14. (C) Gemayel said it became very clear to him, as well as Parliament Majority Leader Saad Hariri, during their February 8 "quartet" meeting (between Gemayel, Hariri, Aoun, and Arab League SYG Amr Moussa) that Aoun was not looking to fill the presidential vacuum with anyone but himself. Gemayel claimed that he and Hariri had been ready to compromise and give in to March 8 demands for a blocking one-third in the cabinet. It was Michel Aoun who refused to accept their compromise without first having a decision on other issues such as the specific division of cabinet ministries, decisions on who would head the ministries, and a agreement on an electoral law and constitutional council. Gemayel said the continued obstruction and additional demands prove that Aoun and Hizballah are not seeking a compromise on the presidency.

NEW MARCH 14 STRATEGY NEEDED

¶15. (C) There is now an urgent need for March 14 to reconsider its strategy and coordination in response to Nasrallah's declaration of war against Israel, according to Gemayel. The opposition's machinations have been leading up to this moment, he added. Gemayel mentioned that March 14 may have to forgo its goal of electing a president for the time being in an effort to focus on countering any future actions by Hizballah.

SISON